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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED: UNHCR REQUEST TO RESETTLE
IRAQI-PALESTINIANS

REF: STATE 56688

1. (SBU) Refcoord delivered ref points in separate conversations with UNHCR Jordan Representative Sten Bronee and UNHCR Iraq Representative Yacoub El Hillo on March 16, emphasizing that a voluntary return to Iraq was the only possible solution for the 348 Iraqi-Palestinians remaining in Ruweished refugee camp. PolCouns reinforced the points in a separate conversation later the same day. While UNHCR continues to pursue a regional solution for this group ("return" to the West Bank and Gaza or residency in Jordan or another Arab country), Bronee said he recognizes that the possibilities of regional resettlement are slim. He commented that U.S. opposition to resettlement of Palestinians outside the region -- including on family reunification grounds -- would make other traditional resettlement countries reluctant to consider the Iraqi-Palestinians. Nevertheless, UNHCR would continue to pursue resettlement possibilities with Australia, Canada, Sweden and Norway. Realistically, he continued, return to Iraq was indeed the only viable solution for this group but security conditions in Baghdad would make it difficult for UNHCR Iraq to organize a voluntary repatriation program. Bronee also claimed erroneously that UNHCR Iraq has been unable to find solutions for the displaced Palestinians in Baghdad.

2. (SBU) Because UNHCR is about to embark on a comprehensive profile of the Iraqi-Palestinians, Bronee requested that refcoord postpone a visit to Ruweished refugee camp until early April. Bronee hopes the profiling exercise will identify candidates for "family reunification" cases in the West Bank and Gaza and resettlement/family reunification cases outside the region. UNHCR will not develop contingency plans for the voluntary return of the Palestinians to Iraq until it has completed the profile. Bronee welcomed refcoord's suggestion that all future discussions of this issue include representatives from the UNHCR Iraq mission, noting that he has been unable to coordinate strategies on this issue even though the Iraq team works just one floor above the Jordan office. The Iraq mission, he complained, has not treated the new caseload as a high priority.

3. (SBU) Separately, Bronee told refcoord he had been convoked by Minister of Interior Habashneh, who complained that 100 Iraqi-Palestinians had slipped out of the Ruweished camp and disappeared into Amman. Most had subsequently been found and returned by GOJ authorities to the camp but Habashneh asked Bronee to tighten up operations and reorganize the camp so GOJ police could keep better watch over the camp's inhabitants. Bronee interpreted this request as an indication the GOJ would allow the camp to remain open beyond the current April 9 deadline.

4. (SBU) Comment: Despite our pleas for better coordination, the UNHCR Jordan and Iraq missions continue to exhibit a total disconnect between their priorities and programs. We will insist that any meetings to address these cross-border issues include representatives from both missions. Reinforcement of this message in Geneva would also be helpful.

5. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.
GNEHM